# *Optimal Arts for Adults:*

## An Exploration of the Theories of Flow and Andragogy as they Apply to Adult Community Art Programs

by

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*"You can only breathe out what you breathe in."*

~ Andy Goldsworthy
(earthworks artist)

# Introduction

> *The arts calm us and excite us, they lift us up and sober us, and they free our spirit from the relentless mill of daily obligations; they entertain as well as instruct us; they help us understand who we are as individuals, as communities, and as people. (The American Assembly, 2000)*

My passion and appreciation for the arts stretches all the way back to my childhood art education in Ohio. Throughout the years, I was fortunate to have consistent mentors in art, from JoAnn Fredrickson in elementary school to Ernie Berg in high school. This foundation for art appreciation remained during my college years as I majored in Art Education at the Ohio State University.

After college, I taught kindergarten at a non-profit school called the Community Children's Project in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Since there was no evident structure for art education, I took it upon myself to create and implement a curriculum specifically for the kindergarten program. Watching the children explore different visual art mediums and hearing them talk about their experiences was highly rewarding. I enjoyed relating to the children as I, too, shared the same feelings when creating my own art.

In retrospect, that life experience has fed the fire for my current pursuits in the Arts Management Master's Degree Program at the University of Oregon. I have always been intrigued by the internal and external factors that influence a person's desire to participate in the arts. Although my primary background is in youth art education, I decided to move beyond those boundaries and examine the adult audience for this capstone paper. Adults of all ages are gravitating toward study in the arts, yet they are often neglected when it comes to quality arts programming (Jefferson, 1987). While some adults perceive art activities as leisure, others pursue it as an occupation, and still others engage in arts study for intellectual, aesthetic growth and stimulation (Hoffman & Greenberg, 1993, p. 131). For these reasons, art facilitators should

take initial steps to critically plan and ensure valuable art experiences in order to engage the adult audience.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage more thoughtful consideration for adult participation in the community arts, and to explore the many factors that can affect an adult's quality of experience during a community art program. By addressing these issues I hope that more meaningful adult programs will be developed and that more adults will recognize the important role art can have in their lives. In effect, there could be greater appreciation and support for the arts in our communities.

For the purposes of this paper, an art program will be acknowledged as any scheduled art activity or class offered by a community art center or local art agency. An art facilitator will be considered as any person who programs, instructs, supervises, or manages art activities. It should also be noted that in this paper art is viewed as *an activity or pursuit of leisure*, instead of a professional or institutional practice. All references to "art" will be limited to and implied as the "visual arts", such as painting, ceramics, and photography. Although the paper's primary focus is on adult experiences in the visual arts, the concepts can be adapted and applied within the contexts of any age group or arts discipline, such as music or theatre. Therefore, it is intended that this paper will benefit the broader fields of adult education, arts management, art education, and leisure studies.

In order to understand how to encourage more meaningful adult art programs, I began reviewing literature from the disciplines of leisure studies, adult learning, and art education. The literature helped to reveal internal and external factors that could affect the quality of experience during adult learning situations. I recognized that the leisure theory, *Flow* had commonalties with both, the inherent benefits of art participation and the adult learning theory, *Andragogy*. Thus, I decided to explore the possibility of ways to experience flow during an andragogically oriented art program. The following questions served as guides for the formation of this paper:

1. In what ways could flow be experienced during an art program?

2. What would be the elements of an andragogically oriented art program?

3. In what ways would an andragogically oriented art program be conducive to flow experiences?

4. What impact does this framework have on adults in regards to their quality of experience and learning in the arts?

The paper was then organized to provide sequential clarity of the links between art, flow, and andragogy, and how this triad can positively affect an adult's experience during community art programs. In the *Background* section, I have provided a general summary of the reviewed literature pertaining to flow and adult learning. The *Connections* section bridges theory with personal application by looking at the commonalties between flow and arts participation, then flow and andragogy. The *Art & Creativity* section is a discussion of a college art class I took while in the process of producing this paper. In hindsight, the class reinforced emerging notions I had about andragogically oriented art programs being conducive to experiencing flow. In the last section, *Towards a New Archetype*, I have provided facilitators of adult art programs recommendations for ways to encourage enjoyable, meaningful, and sustainable art experiences.

## Background Part One: The Flow Experience

> *It is in the full involvement of flow, rather than happiness, that makes for excellence in life. When we are in flow, we are not happy, because to experience happiness we must focus on our inner states, and that would take away attention from the task at hand... Only after the task is completed do we have the leisure to look back on what has happened, and then we are flooded with gratitude for the excellence of that experience-then, in retrospect, we are happy. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 32)*

The literature related to leisure studies provides many definitions for the term, *leisure.* Kleiber (1999) suggests that leisure is some combination of the perception of freedom of choice,

intrinsic motivation, freedom from evaluation, relaxation, and enjoyment (p. 3). Within this concept, several leisure pursuits exist, such as: hiking, tennis, reading, photography, sewing, watching television, or doing nothing at all. Taking the time to enjoy non-work related pursuits could positively effect our quality of life. Furthermore, Howe and Carpenter (1985) believe that there are individuals who can find their identity, autonomy, mastery, and self-expression through leisure engagement (p. 30).

Some leisure pursuits can often evolve into optimal experiences or what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced *chick-sent-ME-high*) calls *Flow*. This psychological state is described as the period of time in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for sheer sake of doing it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4). Although achieving flow during a leisure activity is ideal, the process of getting there might not always be easy. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) believes that optimal experience is something we make happen and those enjoyable experiences, evolving from non-passive, voluntary actions and goals, are the predecessor of experiencing flow (p. 3). To provide further understanding, he defined eight major components of a flow experience in his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990). Since Csikszentmihalyi's initial book on flow he has written several other books and articles related to the topic. In addition, other researchers have referred to Csikszentmihalyi's concepts of flow experiences and the quality of enjoyment in their literature such as Driver, Brown, and Peterson (1991), Russell (1999), and Kelly and Freysinger (2000). Below are Csikszentmihalyi's eight components of a flow experience, as well as my interpretation of each:

1. *A challenging activity that requires skill*
   - physical or mental exertion to complete a problem-solving task
   - skill levels develop in accordance to the challenge of an activity

2. *The merging of action and awareness*
   - the ability to perform is in harmony with the required knowledge

- awareness of *how* you are performing a task

3. *Clear goals and feedback*
   - the results from action are directly linked to the intended goals for the activity

4. *Concentration on the task at hand*
   - keen focus on skill and actions, external distractions are peripheral

5. *The paradox of control*
   - no worries about failure or losing control, it is related to skill
   - one's actions strongly influence desired outcome

6. *The loss of self-consciousness*
   - there is a union with the surrounding environment
   - the focused mind blocks out insecurities of the self

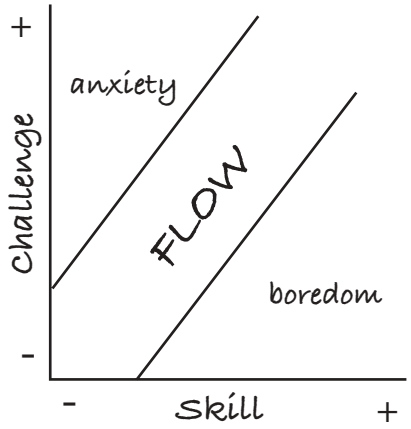
7. *The transformation of time*
   - lose track of time, not strained by the pressure of the clock
   - time flies when you are having fun

8. *The autotelic experience (intrinsic motivation)*
   - the activity is worth doing for its own sake
   - focus is on the process of doing, instead of the final outcome

Regarding these eight components, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) found that the psychological state of flow could border a fine line between boredom and anxiety. If an activity, such as ceramics, is too difficult in relation to one's skill level, then anxiety will set in and the person will start to worry and feel self-doubt. On the other hand, if the activity is too easy, then the person will be bored and lack interest. Flow occurs when one's skills are so perfectly suited to

the challenge that it all just clicks. Everything feels harmonious, unified, effortless (Goleman, Kaufman, Ray, 1992, p. 46). This idea is depicted in the diagram below:

*Figure 1: Flow Graph (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)*




Additionally, the benefits of a flow experience can ultimately make our everyday life more exciting and worthwhile. Kelly and Freysinger (2000) stated that "those who report regular experiences of flow have the highest levels of positive emotional states (p. 85). Even the simplest physical act can become enjoyable when it is transformed so as to produce flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 97). In order to produce flow during any leisure activity, from washing the car to mountain biking, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has suggested five steps to consider:

1. Set an overall goal, and as many sub-goals as are realistically feasible.

2. Find ways of measuring progress in terms of the goals chosen.

3. Keep concentrating on what one is doing, and keep making finer distinctions in the challenges involved in the activity.

4. Develop skills necessary to interact with the opportunities available.

5. Keep raising the stakes if the activity becomes boring.

Although it may seem easier to achieve flow while doing something overtly active like jogging, ashtanga yoga, or gardening, it is "not limited to just physical exertion and skill, but mental and emotional efforts as well" (Russell, 1999, p. 93). Less physically strenuous activities like walking, meditation, or writing poetry can also lead to optimal experiences. Hence, within these broad options, it would follow that flow can be experienced while participating in any type of arts program. I argue that programming such activities conducive to flow can encourage more adult participation, because it reinforces that the arts can be a rewarding and enjoyable leisure pursuit. The significant relationship between arts participation and flow is further analyzed in the *Connections* section of this paper.

## Background Part Two: Adult Learning & Andragogy

> *All of the great teachers of ancient times- Confucius and Lao Tse of China; the Hebrew prophets and Jesus in Biblical times; Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato in ancient Greece- were all teachers of adults... They perceived learning to be a process of active inquiry, not passive reception of transmitted content. (Knowles, 1990, p. 27)*

In this part of the Background section, the context and issues surrounding adult learning needs and styles are addressed. An awareness and understanding of how adults learn is necessary in order to provide meaningful and quality art experiences. However, the use of the word adult can imply several meanings, because the age at which one achieves adulthood varies from person to person. For this paper, I have selected to use the "psychological" definition of adult, as clarified by Malcolm Knowles (1990), which states that it is the age when we are held responsible for our lives and become self-directing individuals. In Knowles' psychological definition, an adult can be categorized as someone who is out of school or college, has a full-time job, married or in a long-term committed relationship, and ready to start a family (p.57).

During adulthood, education and learning have new meaning when compared to the younger years. It is assumed that adults have started to utilize their educational knowledge and

value systems in their everyday life. Generally, an adult's motive for learning is considered to be self-directed, in that learning should be considered as an interactive set of knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors of the individual in pursuit of purposeful self learning experiences with any environmental context (Jones, 1993, p. 159). Merriam (2001) acknowledged that the adult learner is more than a robot processing information. The adult comes with a mind, memories, conscious and subconscious worlds, emotions, imagination, and a physical body, all of which can interact with new learning (p. 96).

In a study conducted in 1950, Cyril O. Houle examined why adults engaged in continuing education, but Knowles (1990) believed that this also shed light on how adults learn (p. 46). Results from the study led Houle to classify adult learners into three categories:

1. *Goal-Oriented Learners:* adults use education for accomplishing fairly clear-cut objectives, (taking a course, joining a group, etc.).

2. *Activity-Oriented Learners:* activity and learning have no clear connection; selection was based on amount and kind of human relationships it would yield.

3. *Learning-Oriented Learners:* adults seek knowledge for its own sake. Unlike the first two categories, these adults have been engrossed in learning as long as they can remember.

In addition to Houle, other educational theorists, such as Carl Rogers, Eduard C. Lindeman, and Malcolm Knowles, have examined the needs and learning styles of adults. Through their extensive research, these theorists have provided a wealth of tangible methods for how to approach adult education (Knowles, 1990, p. 51). Although each examination of adult learning has justifiable and acknowledgeable characteristics, it is outside the scope of this paper to outline the entire history of adult education theory. Therefore, this paper will focus on

*andragogy*, the art and science of helping adults learn, based on Malcolm Knowles' model of adult learning (Knowles, 1990).

The concept of andragogy was evident in Europe years before Knowles began using the term in the United States in 1968. He aimed to provide a new way of understanding and thinking about adult learning in order to distinguish it from pre-adult learning, or *pedagogy* (Merriam, 2001, p.4). Rooted back to the 7th century in Europe, when young boys were being prepared for the priesthood, pedagogy describes a set of assumptions about learning and strategies for teaching. Knowles explained that in literal terms, pedagogy is understood as the art and science of teaching children. This model of education continued well into the 20th century and provided the organizational foundation of our entire educational system (Knowles, 1990, p. 28).

The pedagogical style, which puts emphasis on a teacher-centered learning environment, does not always provide adequate freedom for adults to utilize the extensive skills and knowledge that they have thus far obtained. Since adults are intimately involved in life-centered issues, the opportunities for learning should reinforce these factors. In response to the pedagogical method as a way of teaching adults, E.C. Lindeman once explained that,

> In adult education the curriculum is built around the students needs and interests. Adult education is an attempt to discover a new method and create a new incentive for learning; its implications are qualitative, not quantitative. Teachers are no longer the oracle who speaks from the platform of authority, but rather the guide, the pointer-out who also participates in learning in proportion to the vitality and relevance of his facts and experiences. (Knowles, 1990, p. 29-30)

It should be noted that the breadth of support for an alternative method of educating adults was not meant to degrade the efficacy of pedagogy. In fact, in Lindeman's case, he did not try to dichotomize adult versus youth education. Rather, he compared adult versus conventional

education, thus implying that youth might learn better too, if their needs and interests, life situations, experience, and individual differences were taken into account (Knowles, 1990, p. 32).

With increased interest to establish an accessible and effective style for engaging adults in the educational process, Malcolm Knowles developed a set of six assumptions that differentiated from the pedagogical model of education. His model suggested general characteristics that more accurately portrayed adult learners and their learning needs. This view focused on the learner as the centerpiece to a learning environment. The following is a description of Knowles' andragogical model (Knowles, 1990, p. 57-63):

1. *The need to know*
   - Adult has an increased level of awareness of *why* to learn something before actually deciding to learn it.

2. *The learner's self-concept*
   - Adult has an independent self-concept and can direct his/her own learning. (Warning: in a class listed as "education" or "training", some adults revert back to the dependency conditioning and exclaim, "teach me")

3. *The role of the learner's experience*
   - Adult has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource of learning. Any group of adults will be more heterogeneous- in terms of background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals- than is true of a group of youths.

4. *Readiness to learn*
   - Adult has learning needs closely related to changing social roles/real-life situations.

5. *Orientation to learning*

   - Adult is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge. Adults are motivated to devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations.

6. *Motivation*

   - Adult is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (intrinsic motivation). While adults are responsive to some external motivators, the most potent are internal pressures (self-esteem, job satisfaction, quality of life, etc.).

Since Knowles' model is a set of assumptions, it is critical for adult facilitators to weigh the significance and relevance of each assumption with regards to any given adult learning situation. In fact, there are times when a less self-directed approach is appropriate and taken. According to P.C. Candy, facilitators of learning should not assume that if a person has been self-directed in one situation, he or she will be self-directed in a new area: orientation, support and guidance may all be required in the first stages of a learning project (Merriam, 2001, p. 10).

For example, when an adult engages him or herself in an arts class, such as Beginning Photography, the class facilitator needs to be able to recognize the current knowledge and skills the adult possesses. If the adult has never used a 35mm camera, then technical instruction needs to take place. Ideally there would be verbal and hands-on demonstrations which allow the adult learner to experientially engage in the learning process. The experiential learning emphasizes doing the task in order for the adult to learn it properly (Hansman, 2001, p. 46).

On the other hand, an adult who is well skilled in photography will require a less instructor-centered learning environment. This adult will most likely be self-directed in his or

her own goals for taking the class and therefore the facilitator's assistance or feedback will be on an as needed basis.

To further clarify his andragogical model, Knowles (1990) provided detailed criteria to make his model more accessible to adult learners and facilitators of adult programs. The following are his *Conditions of Learning* (p. 85-87) and *Implications for Adult Educators* (p. 194-195), which describe the ideal learning environment for adults:

***Conditions of Learning:***

1. The learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences.

2. The learners perceive the goals of a learning experience to be their goals.

3. The learners accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, therefore have a feeling of commitment toward it.

4. The learners participate actively in the learning process.

5. The learning process is related to and makes use of the experience of the learners.

6. The learners have a sense of progress toward their goals.

***Implications for Adult Educators:***

1. Educators recognize participants as self-directing and treat them accordingly.

2. The educator is a learning reference for the participants rather than a

traditional instructor; educators are, therefore, encouraged to 'tell it like it is' and stress 'how I do it' rather than tell participants what they should do

3. The educator avoids talking down to participants who are experienced decision-makers and self-starters. The educator instead tries to meet the participants' needs

4. As the adult is his/her experience, failure to utilize the experience of the adult learner is equivalent to rejecting him/her as a person.

5. Learning occurs through helping participants with the identification of gaps in the learner's knowledge

6. No questions are stupid; all questions are 'opportunities' for learning

7. The primary emphasis in the course is on students learning rather than on teachers teaching

8. Involvement in such things as problems to be solved, case histories, and critical incidents generally offer greater learning opportunity for adults than 'talking to them'

Considering Houle's categories of adult learners (i.e., goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented), one may assume that Knowles' guidelines, for the *Conditions of Learning* and *Implications for Adult Educators* are characteristic of Houle's *learning-oriented learner*. Although such an assumption may be true, I also believe that Knowles' guidelines are effective no matter what initial reason an adult may have for entering a specific learning situation.

To further clarify, consider an *activity-oriented learner* who registers for a photography class because a colleague was already registered. If the overall learning experience in the class is rewarding and enjoyable, then future participation can be easily encouraged. After repeated involvement, the adult may become more self-directed and intrinsically oriented to learn about

photography, no matter the social contact obtained through the activity, which was the adult's original motive.

Altogether, the means of facilitating enjoyable activities for adults should be considered if increased adult participation is desired. It is intended that this background in andragogy, with an overview of adult learning styles and needs, could be referenced when planning and implementing quality adult art programs. This content will be expanded in the *Connections* section by linking the characteristics of andragogy with the components of flow experiences.

## Connections Part One: Art & Flow

> *During the course of human evolution, every culture has developed activities designed primarily to improve the quality of experience. Even the least technologically advanced societies have some form of art, music, dance, and a variety of games that children and adults play… However, it is likely that the major raison d'être of art was the same in the Paleolithic era as it is now- namely, it was a source of flow for the painter and for the viewer. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 76)*

Creating your own work of art and being able to say, "I made that" can be one of life's most fulfilling experiences. It is my opinion that arts participation can induce the experience of flow, thereby positively impacting the quality of life for adults. This position is substantially supported by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's portrayal of art, as stated above.

To further articulate, Sir John Lubbock Lord Avebury passionately described art as, "unquestionably one of the purest and highest elements in human happiness; it trains the mind through the eye, and the eye though the mind; as the sun colors flowers, so does art color life" (Orend, 1989, p. 1). Avebury's concept of art can be compared to experiencing flow in that flow makes the present instant more enjoyable. It builds the self-confidence that allows us to develop skills and make significant contributions to humankind (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 42).

The idea of this *inherent enjoyment* for creating art has also been studied by evolutionary biologist, Ellen Dissanyake (1988). Her examination of art, through an evolutionary lens,

implied that art is a fundamental behavioral tendency to "make special" and respond to "specialness" (p. 106). This tendency could be a result of repeated positive experiences one may have while in the process of making art. Dissanyake believed that through artistic creativity, an elemental human need is being expressed and met (Gablik, 1995, p. 41). Moreover, in the book, *The Interrelated Arts in Leisure* (1976), Arnold explained how the arts can become part of every aspect of human life by providing contemplation, self-recognition, fulfillment, challenge, joy, and empathy, (p. 1).

Since art participation can lead to enjoyable life experiences, it is assumed that the characteristics of experiencing flow may be found in common art activities such as painting, ceramics, and photography. Furthermore, during the literature review for this section, I was able to relate several ideas and content to my own experiential perspective as an artist, art educator, and arts administrator. This personal reference helped to clarify the link between art participation and flow experiences. To illustrate the dynamics of this dyad, I have presented the eight characteristics of the flow model with specific examples from art-related activities:

1. *A challenging activity that requires skill*
The first characteristic emphasizes the intensity of an activity. A challenging activity implies that skilled energies- mental, physical, or both- will be utilized. Additionally, Kleiber (1999) states that skills develop progressively in response to expanding challenges (p. 23). This can be evident in almost any adult arts program, from bookmaking and ceramics to drawing and contemporary art theory. A distinct quality of arts participation is that it challenges our capabilities while enhancing our skills simultaneously. This characteristic of flow can be nurtured through varying levels of art classes, such as *Beginning*, *Continuing*, or *Advanced Printmaking*. As adults sequentially experience each printmaking class, they are then transported to a new level of performance (Russell, 1999, p. 94).

2. *The merging of action and awareness*
The second characteristic describes how during an activity, action and awareness blend harmoniously. While participating in an art class, such as *Oil*

*Painting*, an adult's attention can become completely absorbed by intense involvement. The adult's awareness is keen on the application of the oil paint onto the blank white canvas. During this process, the skill so perfectly matches the task, that there is no anxiety for failure or fear of boredom.

3. *Concentration on the task at hand*

The third characteristic emphasizes the participant's level of concentration. It is important to have a clear mind in order to completely focus and enjoy an art activity. This aspect is often relevant and significant when taking a high-risk art class, such as woodworking. Intense concentration can limit incoming information to only positive optimal thoughts. Also, any lapse in focused concentration could yield injury or design errors, perhaps while using a jigsaw or drill.

4. *The loss of self-consciousness*

The fourth characteristic deals with the loss of self-consciousness and a union with the surrounding environment. Russell (1999) explains that when an activity is thoroughly engrossing there is not enough energy left over to allow us to consider ourselves (p. 95). This can be noticeable during a black and white photography class, when adults are completely captivated by the darkroom environment. The aesthetic process of developing a black and white photograph leaves little time to contemplate self-serving issues.

5. *Clear goals and feedback*

The fifth characteristic asserts clear goals and feedback. This is related to the first characteristic of skillful and challenging activities. In some cases, the more challenging the arts activity, the more enjoyable the experience because there is the opportunity for greater positive feedback. An example of this is evident during a ceramics class. Centering the clay on the wheel is one of the most challenging parts of wheel throwing. Without a centered piece of clay it is difficult to continue with the process. Therefore, a clear goal would be to center the clay with ease. In return, the immediate feedback would be feeling the clay spin smoothly and evenly between the hands.

6. *The paradox of control*

The sixth characteristic recognizes a sense of control over the arts activity. This notion is supported by the freedom of choice one can experience while creating a unique, aesthetic work of art. For instance, when painting, the artist has complete control over the choice of paints (watercolors, oil, acrylic, etc.), color (white to black), subject matter (realistic to non-representational), and so on. The individual possibilities can be endless and rewarding.

7. *The transformation of time*

The seventh common characteristic emphasizes the transformation of time. As the old saying goes: time flies when you are having fun. In my opinion this is one of the greatest benefits of experiencing flow and it can occur during any artistic pursuit. The common feeling of being a slave to the clock diminishes and weighty concerns become secondary when thoroughly engrossed in an arts activity.

8. *The autotelic experience (intrinsic motivation)*

The eighth, and final, characteristic states that the arts activity is an autotelic experience. Therefore, the activity lends itself to intrinsic rewards, which means the benefit of doing something is the satisfaction gained from doing it (Russell, 1999, p. 48). When involved in any arts related activity the hungry, intrinsic urge to create is evident when you cannot wait to pick up your paintbrush, wedge the clay, or process and print your recently shot roll of film.

Art experiences, such as those mentioned above, warrant more emphasis during community art programming. Consideration for the means of facilitating engaging programs, that provide intrigue and rewarding art experiences, can encourage more adults to choose art as a frequent leisure pursuit.

# Connections Part Two: Andragogy & Flow

> *Many people give up on learning after they leave school because thirteen or twenty years of extrinsically motivated education is still a source of unpleasant memories. Their attention has been manipulated long enough from the outside by textbooks and teachers, and they have counted graduation as the first day of freedom… Ideally, the end of extrinsically applied education should be the start of an education that is motivated intrinsically. At that point (the goal) is to understand what is happening around one, to develop a personally meaningful sense of what ones experience is all about. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 141-142)*

In this section, the theories of flow and andragogy are explored and linked in order to provide further insight into facilitating enjoyable art experiences for adults. The tangible and intangible characteristics of a learning environment are crucial to a learner's overall experience. Hence, if the conditions are right, flow will follow. The following notions guide this exploration:

1. Andragogy is making a positive difference in the way programs of adult learning are being organized and operated (Knowles, 1990, p. 53), and

2. Activities conducive to flow are designed in a way that make optimal experience easier to achieve (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 71).

It is my inclination that Knowles' *Implications for Adult Educators*, as discussed in the Background section of this paper, provides an effective framework and design for art facilitators to model in order to create an environment conducive to flow.

It is important to recognize that both the adult learner and the facilitator of learning play key roles in creating an optimal learning experience. With an understanding of the characteristics of flow and andragogy, I have assumed that self-directed adults are more likely to experience flow during learning pursuits than those who are less, or not at all, self-directed. A self-directed person pursues intrinsically rewarding activities, sets measurable goals, and has some control over intended outcomes. These qualities are evident in both the theories of flow and andragogy.

Regarding program facilitation, Knowles (1990) suggested that facilitators should recognize adults as self-directing and to treat them accordingly (p. 194). Yet of course, adults will not always be self-directing in every learning pursuit, nor will they be in flow at all times. Anxiety and boredom can set in during any learning pursuit. Attentive facilitators will recognize these moments and provide assistance, because learning occurs through helping adults identify with knowledge gaps and skill deficiencies (Knowles, 1990, p. 195). Likewise, Jones (1993) explained that at the core of helping learners gain a sense of self-direction is providing them with repeated opportunities to exert control and then getting them to recognize they are the source of success when it occurs (p. 187). With effective facilitation, the adult learner can develop more skills, gain control over his or her experience and decrease self-doubt, thereby enhancing the opportunity to be engaged in an optimal experience, or flow.

On the other hand, if an adult learner's actions are in harmony with the recommended knowledge and skills, the facilitation takes on a new role. When the adult has reached a level of self-direction, continual assistance from a facilitator does not need to occur. If the adult is capable of attaining his or her own goals, concentration can become more keenly focused on the existing task. Once an adult reaches this level of competence and self-reliability, the current engagement in the activity can become more intrinsically rewarding.

The graph below further illustrates how the concepts of andragogy can be facilitated in order to encourage more flow experiences during an activity. It is assumed, in the graph, that flow occurs while an adult is self-directed in his or her learning pursuit. At this stage, an adult is more likely to perform in harmony with a challenging task because he or she has adequate physical and mental competencies. As mentioned earlier, if an adult reverts to non-self-direction, or becomes anxious or bored, then the facilitator should provide suggestions or assistance so the adult can regain control and enjoyment of the current experience.

*Figure 2: Flow & Andragogy Graph*

Overall, I believe an inherent function of both andragogy and flow is to make a learning activity intrinsically motivating and meaningful. In order for this to occur, it first requires an adult to express interest in the activity, either from previous participation or alternative resources, such as literature or word-of-mouth. If an initial experience is enjoyable, similar to making a positive first impression, then repeated involvement is more likely. Therefore, in consideration of attracting a broader adult audience, facilitators should create more adult learning environments that have tangible appeal and promise a worthwhile leisure engagement.

## ***Art & Creativity*: An Exemplar in Art, Flow, and Andragogy**

*There is much for us to do and great joy in the doing. I look forward to it with as much anticipation as you do. - George Kokis*

While completing the requirements for the Master's Degree Capstone option, I took the class, *Art and Creativity*, through the University of Oregon's Art Department in the Winter 2003 term. The class was taught by the Ceramic Department's Professor Emeritus, George Kokis. At the end of the first day of class George distributed his "Letter to perspective members of the *Art*

*and Creativity Class",* which provided his intentions for the rest of the term. The opening paragraph read as follows:

> The work we are about to do, and the way we do it, is sometimes perceived as "non-structured". This is actually not the case. While the structural form may not be immediately evident- nevertheless it is there. What may be different from typical structural forms and this class is when and how structure arrives on the scene. I provide part of it, although it could be seen as "loose" or "permissive". The rest arrives appropriately emergent through the group's unique character and particular interests. The structure is not applied but evolves as the process and personalities require. (Kokis, 2003, p.1)

It should be noted that, although this class was taken as a Capstone requirement, my exploration of the links between art, flow, and andragogy had not yet been determined. However, in retrospect this class exemplified the qualities needed to promote flow experiences while engaged in an andragogically oriented art program. Through participation in the class, I recognized qualities of Knowles' andragogical model and Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow within George's facilitation style. In fact, to my surprise, during one class discussion George explained his interpretation of the flow model and how it related to art and creativity.

Regarding the structure of the class, we were always actively engaged in a learning experience that was personally relevant and in turn, directly impacted our class goals. The learning environment was always inviting and provided freedom of expression, as well as mutual respect from co-learners. Additionally, George accepted all of us as self-directed adults, capable of a wealth of creative desires. His class was a delightful mix of learning, play, and self-realization. With these characteristics it would follow that, since the conditions were well suited to the needs of the learners, the environment could easily cultivate optimal experiences. Indeed, my enjoyment level was consciously higher after some of the classes in which I was sure that I had experienced flow. To provide further explanation, below is a condensed overview of a typical day in George's *Art & Creativity* class:

The class started promptly at six o'clock in the evening. At the beginning, we stood in a circle, arms around each other, and performed a dance to a beautiful Native American folk song. The dance was so simple, consisting of stepping forward, backward, to the left, and then repeat. Meanwhile we were rotating the human circle clockwise throughout the duration of the song. At first, some students cringed at the dance, rolling their eyes to the fact that they were adults and that they were too cool to be dancing. Yet, after repeated classes we soon realized it was a unique way to bond and welcome the upcoming activities for the evening. I often thought it would be great if every type of class started with such a friendly ritual. It nourishes the potential to make a learning experience so much more meaningful and pleasing.

After the dance, we would push three garbage cans filled with clay out into the center of the class and proceed to slop the clay onto the surrounding tables. Once there was enough clay out, George would discuss his intentions for the evening's activity. We never knew what to expect from him, but we were always intrigued to find out and begin our creative explorations. In general, the activities consisted of improvisational ways of working with the clay. This approach to art making reinforced our potential as self-directing, creative individuals. George referred to this as the "Hermetic Method", which he defined as "floating free, by associative wandering, brainstorming, insights, lucky finds, intuitions- freeing the process from the structures of systematic order and tight sequential progressions" (Kokis, 2003, p.1).

One particular activity started with fifteen minutes of improvising with clay set to music, selected by George. The music varied from classical to jazz. During this time period, each person had to create as many clay forms as possible. Once the time had expired, we had to choose one of our clay forms and discard the rest. The solo piece was then the "matriarch". Then, each person had to create their own clay "family", which were all "descendants" of the mother form. This process was also set to music.

After some time, George asked us to stop and separate the family of forms into three stylistic categories: *good, so-so, and bad*. Next, we had to toss out the so-so group and write on a piece of paper why we selected the forms that were good and bad. George then had us throw out the good and we were left with only the bad forms.

As we reviewed our "bad" group, George asked us to relate our reasons for why they were bad to our own personal traits. I recall writing responses such as, "undecided, confused, and lost". To my surprise, George then asked all of us to revise the flaws so as to make them positive. In reference to my previous response, my list was changed to "I like several options, I have grand ideas, and I am creating my own path in life". The revision impacted my outlook on life, because I was forced to look at myself in a non-pessimistic light. It led me to believe more strongly that people can make conscious efforts to positively change their quality of experience.

At the end of the activities, we all gathered together to discuss how we felt during the process and its significance to our creative potential. Throughout the discussion George would often add insightful excerpts from literature that paralleled the day's activities. The last portion of class was devoted to George reading a chapter from the book, *The Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981), by Anne Cameron. George thought this story, about Pacific Northwest Native Americans, was inspiring and worthy of sharing with his class. I thought the story interestingly paralleled our need to acknowledge our true identities in the search for creativity.

This section has provided an example of what an andragogically-oriented art program conducive to flow could look like. Although this class was an academic course taken for credit, I have acknowledged it with the intent that the ideas and concepts would transfer well to non-credit adult learning environments. It is beneficial to recognize what is currently taking place in any learning environment in order to effectively plan for new learning pursuits. This idea is helpful in creating art programs that motivate and encourage adult participation by promising to reward adults with enjoyable and lifelong experiences in art.

# Towards a New Archetype: Conclusion and Recommendations

> *A community should be judged good not because it is technologically advanced, or swimming in material riches; it is good if it offers people a chance to enjoy as many aspects of their lives as possible, while allowing them to develop their potential in the pursuit of ever greater challenges. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 191)*

The preceding pages have presented an alternative view of adult art programming. It is a view that focuses on the adult's experience while participating in the visual arts. To some, this focus may seem limiting because it emphasizes the individual, not a group at large. However, this alternative view is significant in that it approaches community art support from the inside out. In agreement with Csikszentmihalyi (1990), I believe that "no social change can come about until the consciousness of individuals is changed first" (p. 191). Seppo E. Iso-Ahola (1999) noted that the achievement of intrinsic rewards, during leisure activities, in turn reinforces continued and deep involvement (p. 39). Therefore, by acknowledging the specific needs of adult participants, it is likely that increased and continual participation may occur among more adults.

I have titled the final section of this paper, *Towards a New Archetype* because it most accurately describes my goal for art facilitators. The *American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition* (1994) defines *archetype* as "an original model or type after which other similar things are patterned." This *original model* can directly influence the course of future products. In the case of this paper, the product would be the adult's experience during a facilitated art program.

With support from the literature related to leisure studies, adult learning, and art education, I conclude that the ability to experience flow during an andragogically-oriented art program is possible. Andragogically-oriented art programs are designed to meet the needs and learning styles of adult participants. In this way, they provide opportunities that help enrich adults' daily experiences by encouraging creativity, spirit, and potential, therefore intensifying who they are and their community (The American Assembly, 2000). The recommendations

provided below are intended to motivate facilitators towards the idea of planning and implementing andragogically oriented art programs that are conducive to flow experiences.

## Recommendations:

***Provide several different types of art programs***

The type and quality of an art program directly influence an adult's overall art experience. Adults often attend classes in order to enhance their knowledge in a particular life-need area and art facilitators should be considerate of this standard (Roberts, 1989, p. 45). A comprehensive program schedule that offers a range of art mediums, class times, and formats, will give adults the freedom and flexibility to choose which classes are most relevant to their specific intent. Art facilitators should develop needs assessment evaluation tools and conduct surveys or community open forums designed to solicit programming ideas from adults. Even if each programming cycle includes one to two new adjustments, it will show adults that their needs and interests are being considered. Below are programming formats that could provide ideal conditions for adults:

1. Open Studios: In comparison to an art program that has an instructor teaching art techniques and methods, an open studio is a fine example of a self-directed art program. Adults are provided a meeting time and studio space to work on their own art and an instructor is available to assist, when needed. Open studios are usually medium-specific and require participants to have a working knowledge of the art medium.

2. Workshops: This type of program is ideal for adults who are interested in taking a class, but cannot commit to a full term or just want to get a taste of a particular art medium. Workshops are flexible because they usually occur in a

matter of a few days, such as three evenings or over a weekend. Art facilitators can also schedule workshops as intensive supplements to a term long class. For example, a supplemental workshop for a regular ceramics wheel throwing class could be a weekend workshop about Raku firing. This ceramics technique is very rewarding to learn and the adult participants may enjoy the added challenge.

3. Partner Classes: For many adults, the week is filled with work, errands, and other daily obligations that leave little time for family and friends. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) attests that relationships with other people can result in the fulfillment of happiness (p. 167). An art program that invites adults to attend with another person can be very positive and rewarding. It is a great opportunity for adults to spend quality time with a significant other, family member, or close friend.

***Encourage personal growth***

It is recommended that art programs encourage physical, mental, and emotional efforts that support personal growth. It is assumed that personal growth can increase adults' self-confidence and self-directedness. When growth is progressive adults can more easily recognize and appreciate their own developing achievements. One way facilitators can accomplish this is to create sequential programs, such as beginning, intermediate, and advanced art classes. By offering sequenced classes, adults can be motivated to further challenge themselves and build their knowledge in a particular art medium. Adults will also acquire a sense of progress toward achieving their goals, which are directly related to their art interest. When adults can blend their level of performance with the required skills, their ability to experience flow can be easier to achieve (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Another option for art facilitators is to keep adults updated on current art and cultural affairs. Discussions can take place regarding literature, music, or theatre in their community and

beyond. Facilitators can inform adults about upcoming art shows and "call for entries". For some adults this may provide the encouragement they need to show their art in a broader context. Adults will not only improve their awareness of contemporary art and culture, but they will also expand their intellectual knowledge about themselves and their communities.

***Acknowledge every adult participant***

In order to encourage optimal experiences during art programs, it is important to create an environment characterized by mutual trust and freedom of expression (Knowles, 1990). Therefore, art facilitators should make every effort to acknowledge each adult's interests and goals. If facilitators converse regularly with the adults and make it evident that they care about their artistic interests, in turn, they may feel more at ease.

This recommendation also suggests that the hierarchy of facilitator to adult participant should be leveled to a *near equal* status. The emphasis is then placed on every adult and their learning needs, rather than a show and tell of the facilitator's talents. In addition, facilitators can encourage adults to share in the process of developing the art class, such as what techniques to learn or how much time to spend on a specific subject. Not only will the facilitators learn more about the adults' goals, but also the adults can share in the responsibility of the class and have a stronger commitment toward its outcome (Knowles, 1990, p. 85). An easy way to achieve this interaction between the facilitator and the adult participants would be to have a brief open discussion at the beginning of each class. It is a great opportunity to introduce everyone, but it also reinforces that there is a mutual respect and openness to the entire class.

***Create a relaxed environment***

All in all, this could be one of the most important recommendations for art facilitators. Ulrich, Dimberg, and Driver believe that if adults are stressed, leisure encounters with the most natural settings can have stress-reducing influences (Driver, Brown, and Peterson, 1991, p. 77). Hence, adults should be able to forget about their daily burdens during leisure pursuits. A

relaxed environment can allow adults to more fully engage in enjoyable experiences. This is not to say that all art programs should be easy. On the contrary, even the most skillfully challenging art programs can allow adults to become thoroughly engrossed and relaxed during an activity. When involved so intensely, there is not enough energy for discouragement and self-doubt, therefore it is easier to experience flow (Russell, 1999, p. 95).

A few ways to create a relaxed environment are to play soft music, encourage friendly conversation, and ask everyone to remove his or her watch. That is right, forget time! The music and conversation can help divert adults from the busy chatter inside their head. It will also encourage adults to focus more energy on the artistic process and not worry if they need to pick up their kids in thirty minutes, or go grocery shopping after class. The facilitator can be there to give the time periodically, and if an adult needs to leave at a specific time, he or she can let the facilitator know in advance. Thus, facilitators show that they recognize the importance of leisure during adulthood and are sensitive towards the needs of adults (Howe and Carpenter, 1985, p. 23).

Finally, these recommendations for a *new archetype* serve as an initial guide for planning and implementing ideal conditions for experiencing flow during andragogically oriented art programs. Although the recommendations were initially written for adult visual art programs, it is intended that they can be adapted for any age group in a community arts or leisure learning environment. Art facilitators who make a considerate effort to address the needs and learning styles of their participants, by *providing several different types of art programs; encouraging personal growth; acknowledging every participant; and creating a relaxed environment*, will ensure optimal enjoyment and positive rewards. In turn, participants of all age groups will greater appreciate the importance of art in their lives and will want to increase support for art in their community.

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